

Kickoff Workshop 2013

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After an incredibly successful year of GPA in 2012 the GPA Staff has been eagerly awaiting the kick-off of the new 2013-2014 year. Thirty participants from last year returned to the GPA program to become team leaders and mentors to the new participants. This year we have eighty-eight participants hailing from all parts of the US, and from as far away as Palau (Micronesia).

This year has gotten off to an electric start. The influx of new faces and personalities created an exciting environment in which everyone was happy to meet new people, make new friends, and begin a monumental year in their young lives.

All participants were divided into one of four nations and then organized into smaller teams. In these teams they participated in many different activities and competitions over the course of the first week. “The Amazing Race” activity had teams run around the entire Barrytown College campus completing different team-building challenges. An all-star relay race had nations cheering for their representatives as they made their way around the track, passing their flag. Volleyball training was held each afternoon and culminated in a thrilling tournament. An open mic night proved that this incoming year has incredible talent and potential.

The week was also filled with internal guidance given with the aim of preparing participants for the year ahead. Presentations touched on GPA’s three objectives: 1. Develop a personal relationship with God and True Parents, 2. Understand and be able to apply and teach the Divine Principle, and 3. Experience public life and leadership in alignment with the current providence. They also delved into the value of a life of faith, the importance of making a choice to find God, the meaning of God’s words, how to set goals, and the deeper purpose of fundraising.

Prior to concluding the first week of kick-off, GPA held its annual notebook ceremony. One integral part of the GPA program is its emphasis on self-reflection as a key tool for digesting experiences, setting goals, and growing. Thus, before the start of kick-off, the second and third years had spent hours decorating and personalizing notebooks for the incoming year. On the night of the ceremony, amid laughter and tears, each first year participant was given a notebook. Many shared how they felt so much love and gratitude for all that had been put into such a precious gift.

After the first week, the entire GPA program took time for a one week fundraising condition; this was a chance to put the guidance they had received into practice and get a taste of the value of fundraising. Many valuable experiences were gained by the new members, many of which have never fund raised before. The firsthand experience also allowed participants to formulate a clearer sense of purpose for their year here and what they hope to gain.

The last week of the kick-off was largely comprised of lectures by Reverend Schanker. A large component of his lectures took an in-depth look at the Divine Principle followed by Q&A sessions. He also gave valuable internal guidance ranging from prayer to making good life choices. This year, all GPA participants will spend time daily studying the Divine Principle.

One highlight of the last week was two back-to-back evenings of skit competition. During the first week, each nation had selected a winner and runner up to represent their nation. Over the course of the kick-off and fundraising time they practiced and perfected their performances for the night of competition. The evening was filled with laughter, tears, and moved hearts as participants performed.

Starting this year, GPA is implementing a new program model. The year will no longer be divided into modules; rather, all members will participate in the various components of the program at the same time. All will begin with fundraising as an internal foundation for their year. Between each fundraising period, nations will meet for workshops at various locations throughout the United States. In the beginning of 2014, all participants will travel overseas to serve in several South and Central American countries. The remainder of the year will be comprised of Community Outreach, and Specialized Ministry.

This kick-off has proved to be an amazing start to this year. There was such profound openness, vulnerability, gratitude, and love between all first, second, third year members, and core staff. On this foundation we only look forward to this year with great anticipation and profound joy and gratitude.